

SOUND ART IN JOHANNESBURG: A CRITICAL REVIEW 2005-2009

By BJ Engelbrecht

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I offer a critical review of 'sound art' in Johannesburg between 2005 and 2009. The term 'sound art' was coined by Dan Lander in 1989. According to Christoph Cox, Dan Lander's lament that sound art lacked "any substantial discourse" in 1989 still applied in 2007. My intention in this research is to start such a critical discourse for sound art in Johannesburg.

I argue that sound art is a distinctive practice in the city, involving the body politic and underground, surface and edge as characterised by Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall in their recent major work on Johannesburg. First I briefly consider the history of sound art, referring to Brandon Labelle's view that this history parallels that of site-specific art. I then suggest that the popularity of sound art under review became popular for a number of reasons; what Walter Ong's termed "a shift in the sensorium", the immediacy and inexpensiveness of working with sound, and the rise of the home computer. I also locate the sonic practices constituting sound art in audio culture as a whole, focussing on the structure, materiality, recording, playback and transmission of the sonic event in the sonic landscape. Sound, silence, noise and music are all part of this focus. I finally examine sound in terms of space, time, body and network in the work of Frances Goodman, Siobhan McCusker, The Trinity Session, Teamuncool, Gerhard Marx and my own sound work involving sampling, *Happy Station* (2008) and *Slice Me Nice* (2009).

Keywords: Sound art, Johannesburg, Sonic Event, Sonic Landscape, Sonic Matter, Recording, Playback, Sampling.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

(Name of Candidate)

____/____/____
(date)

(Signature)

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